



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

October 1, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on a proposal to purchase by fee title 2,840 acres known as "Whitetail Prairie" from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) for its appraised value. The property adjoins the 32,320 acre FWP owned and managed Beartooth Wildlife Management Area. Whitetail Prairie is located within FWP Administrative Region 4, eight (8) miles east of Craig and 29 miles northeast of Helena, MT in the Big Belt Mountain complex.

Specific objectives of the project include:

- a. Preserve and protect the conservation values of the property, particularly the native intermountain grassland and native mountain stream riparian habitat it provides for wildlife and fisheries species into perpetuity.
- b. Secure a large amount of high quality Missouri River watershed fisheries habitat.
- c. Expand the 32,320 acre Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, providing perpetual public recreational access to an additional 3,720 acres (2,840 acres of private lands, 640 acres DNRC and 240 acres BLM lands).

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Management Plan have been provided for your review. Public comment is welcome and will be accepted October 6 - November 4, 2014. A public meeting on this proposed acquisition will be held at the Wolf Creek School, October 20th at 7:00 pm. If you have questions, need additional copies of the draft EA or choose to provide written comments, please contact FWP at the following address:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Attn: Whitetail Prairie Acquisition
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or electronic comments to: fwprg42@mt.gov
Attn: Whitetail Prairie Acquisition

Thank you for your interest and involvement,

Gary Bertellotti

FWP Region 4 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

**Draft Environmental Assessment
Beartooth Wildlife Management Area
“Whitetail Prairie Addition”**



October 2014

Draft Environmental Assessment Checklist

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase by fee title 2,840 acres known as "Whitetail Prairie" from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) for its appraised value of \$4,075,000. The property adjoins the 32,320 acre FWP owned and managed Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (BTWMA).

FWP proposes to use a combination of FWP Habitat Montana Program (1/4) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pittman Robertson dollars (3/4) to fund the purchase. The property contains very important intermountain/foothill grassland habitat and recreational values. In addition to the acquisition, the grazing leases on adjoining Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) lands associated with the Whitetail Prairie property would be transferred to FWP, 200 and 640 acres respectively.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

FWP has the authority under state law (§ 87-1-201, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)) to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future, and to acquire land for this purpose (§ 87-1- 209 MCA).

3. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor, if other than the agency: None

4. Anticipated Schedule:

Public Comment Period: October 6 – November 4, 2014

Decision Notice Published: November 7-14, 2014

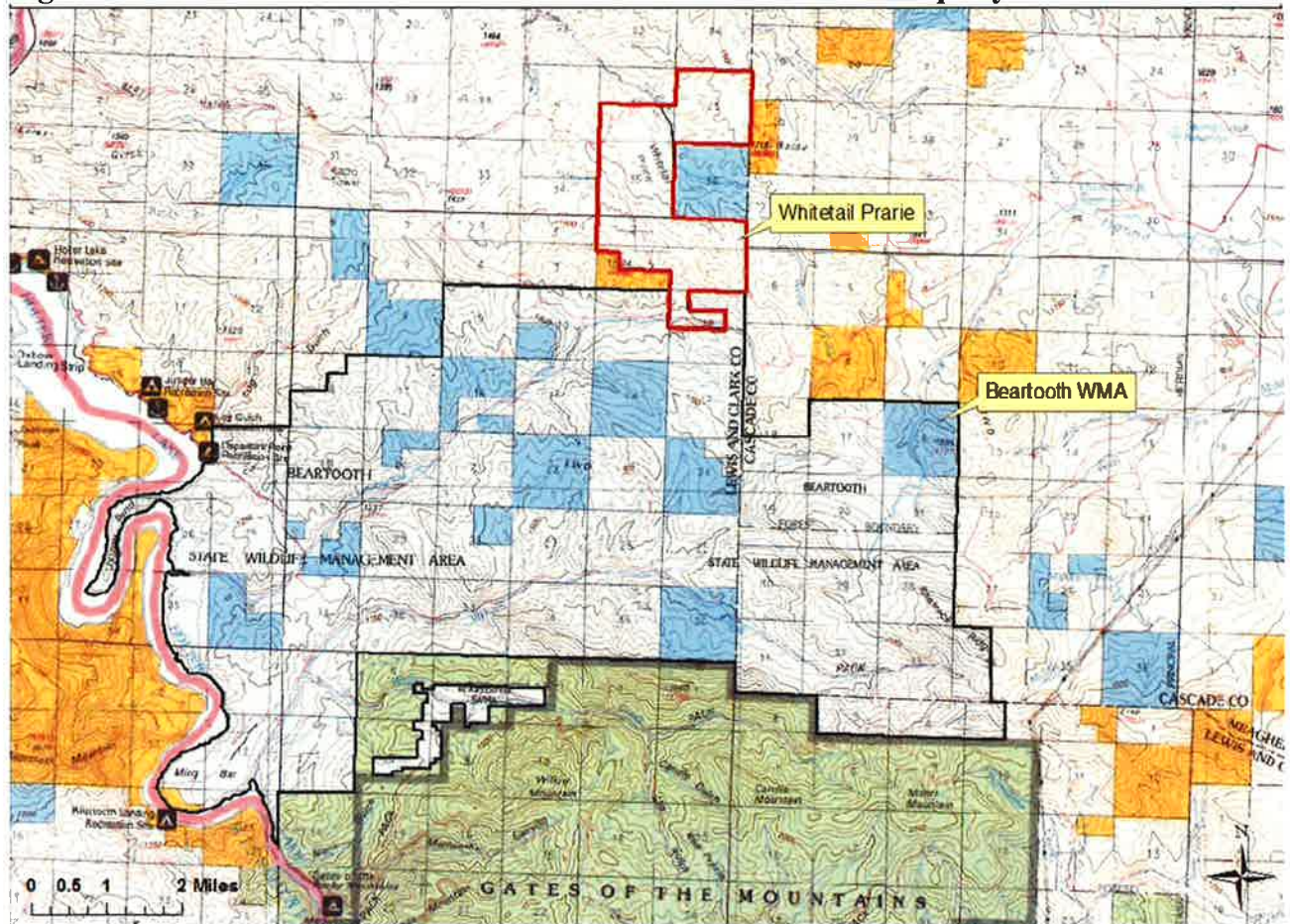
Reviewed by FWP Fish and Wildlife Commission: December 11, 2014

Reviewed by Montana Board of Land Commissioners: December 15, 2014

5. Locations affected by proposed action:

Whitetail Prairie is located within FWP Administrative Region 4, adjoining the north side of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area. Whitetail Prairie is 8 miles east of Craig and 29 miles northeast of Helena, MT in the Big Belt Mountain complex. The property's legal description is T14N R2W portions of Sections 01, 02, and 12 and T15N R2W portions of sections 25, 26, and 35 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location of Beartooth WMA and the Whitetail Prairie Property



6. Estimated project size:

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0.0</u>
Residential	<u>2.0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0.0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(b) Open Space/	<u>0.0</u>	Irrigated cropland	<u>0.0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Dry cropland	<u>0.0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>46.0</u>	Forestry	<u>1,647.00</u>
Areas		Rangeland	<u>1,145.00</u>
		Other	<u> </u>

7. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: None required

(b) Funding:

US Fish & Wildlife Service Pittman-Robertson	\$3,056,250
F WP Habitat Montana	\$1,018,750
SUM	\$4,075,000

(c) Other Overlapping Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name:</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
FWP Fish & Wildlife Commission	purchase approval
Montana State Land Board	purchase approval
State Historic Preservation Office	cultural & historic resources
Lewis & Clark County Weed District	weed inventory

8. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

The purpose of the proposed project is to protect intermountain grassland and forested habitats that are important year round and winter range to ungulates and numerous other fish and wildlife species and to increase (and guarantee) public recreational access. Additionally, this project provides a unique opportunity to secure a large amount of high quality Missouri River watershed fisheries habitat. Elevations within the property range from 4,200 to approximately 5,800 at its highest peak.

Whitetail Prairie provides year-round habitat for game species such as elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, black bear, mountain lion, wolf, furbearers, and mountain grouse. The property provides year-round habitat not only for game species, but a variety of non-game bird and small mammal species.

Vegetation present include rangeland grasses such as bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, rough fescue, green needlegrass, timothy, bluejoint, Kentucky bluegrass, basin wildrye, cheatgrass, western wheatgrass, thickspike wheatgrass and prairie junegrass. Some forb species found on the area include western yarrow, rush species, fringed sagewort, cudweed sagewort, arrowleaf balsamroot, lupine, hairy goldenaster and pussytoes. Shrubs species including skunkbrush, snowberry, wild rose, chokecherry, serviceberry, dogwood, bitterbrush, creeping juniper, silver sagebrush and Wyoming big sagebrush are present. Conifer and deciduous tree species common to the area include Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, limber pine, lodgepole pine, Rocky Mountain juniper, black cottonwood, willow, hawthorn, birch, Rocky Mountain maple and quaking aspen.

The property encompasses portions of 3 perennial streams (Frazier, Wegner and Cottonwood Creeks), which are tributaries of the Missouri River. Westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) inhabit the 0.75 miles of Cottonwood Creek on the property which is part of a 10.5 miles rehabilitation project completed in 2010. WCT may inhabit Wegner Creek since they are known to exist

within the creek at the headwaters with Stickney Creek on BLM property. The WCT population is one of the largest restored and/or native populations in the Upper Missouri River watershed. The property provides spawning and rearing habitat and is the upstream source of water quality for Cottonwood Creek.

Currently, the property is managed as a working ranch with cattle grazing and recreation the primary activities on the property. Whitetail Prairie also holds grazing leases on an additional 200 acres BLM, 640 acres DNRC, and 160 acres FWP lands adjacent to their deeded property. There is a primitive bunkhouse on the property in NW ¼ S ½ Section 26, T15N, R02W, along with established perimeter fencing.

The property provides recreational access to 2,840 acres of deeded lands plus an additional 880 acres of currently inaccessible DNRC and BLM lands, thus offering recreational access to 3,720 acres.

The property plays a key role in management of the Devil's Kitchen Elk Management Unit (EMU) elk herd and presently lies within FWP's elk and deer Hunting District 445 (HD 445) and Bear Management Unit 440 (BMU 440).

The property, if acquired, would be part of a larger management scheme entailed with the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (Appendix B). All FWP WMA Management Plans address such items as public recreational access, habitat and vegetation management, and wildlife and fisheries use.

The specific objectives of the project include:

- a. Preserve and protect the conservation values of the property, particularly the native intermountain grassland and native riparian habitat it provides for wildlife and fisheries species into perpetuity.
- b. Secure a large amount of high quality Missouri River watershed fisheries habitat.
- c. Expand the 32,320 acre Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, providing perpetual public recreational access to an additional 3,720 acres (2,840 acres of private lands, 640 acres DNRC and 240 acres BLM lands). Without this acquisition, there is no guaranteed public access to the project area or adjoining public lands.

9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not purchase the Whitetail Prairie property from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, who then as a result would sell to another buyer by listing the property on the open market.

A change in ownership may also change land uses, public access, and activities permitted on the property.

Alternative B: Acquisition of the Whitetail Prairie Property

For FWP, the proposed acquisition of 2,840 acres is immediately adjacent to the Beartooth WMA. It includes intermountain/foothill grasslands important to ungulates and numerous other wildlife species seasonally and year-round, along with mountain stream habitats important to westslope cutthroat trout and other aquatic species. In addition to preserving and protecting wildlife and fisheries habitats, the acquisition would guarantee public recreational access to the Whitetail Prairie property and to the legally accessible adjoining BLM and DNRC lands. Furthermore, this will also most likely be the only opportunity to expand the Beartooth WMA acreage, due to the large private landownership patterns on the north and east boundaries and USFS Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area as the south boundary.

Cost share partners who have indicated their interest in providing financial assistance for the acquisition include Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (MTFWCT), and Great Falls Chapter Safari Club International (SCI). FWP's proposed purchase from RMEF and the cost share partner's strong interest in contributing funding demonstrates the partnership's commitment to conserving and protecting this property for the public forever.

As with the BTWMA, the Whitetail Prairie addition would be open to hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, and wildlife viewing, as allowed under FWP hunting and WMA rules and regulations. Keeping with public access to BTWMA, the property would be open from noon May 15 through November 30, with a seasonal wintering big game security closure of December 1 – noon May 15 annually. Public access would be restricted to non-motorized only (foot, horseback, mountain bike), as it is on the BTWMA.

As previously mentioned, the property lies in FWP Hunting District 445 (HD 445), which it would remain. Should the HD 445 regulations not meet the needs of FWP, the resource or the public, the property (or a portion of the property), could be annexed into the Hunting District 455 (BTWMA/Gates of the Mountains Wilderness) regulations. Should that process/proposal occur, it would be proposed through FWP's public biennial season setting process.

The existing bunkhouse structure would be maintained and utilized by the Department for seasonal Administrative use only as with other BTWMA bunkhouses and structures.

Currently, neighboring landowner Sieben Live Stock Company leases Whitetail Prairie and associated DNRC, BLM and FWP leases for cattle grazing. Should the Whitetail Prairie be successfully acquired by FWP through this EA process, cattle grazing would cease. FWP would review past grazing schemes and assess the potential of grazing as a tool in vegetation and habitat management. Should cattle grazing be proposed in the future on the project area, a new grazing management plan and lease would be subject to its own public Environmental Assessment process.

Some existing interior service roads would continue to be maintained for Administrative use and property maintenance, others may be rehabilitated to native vegetation in the future.

Acquisition of this property would be consistent with goals of FWP's 2005 Montana Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy to conserve two of Montana's Community Types of Greatest Conservation Need: Grasslands and Mountain Streams. As described in the Strategy, grassland communities occur in broad western mountain valleys and high mountain meadows with very low to high cover grasses and interspersed shrubs characteristic of these areas. This community type is essentially associated with more terrestrial species in greatest need of conservation than any other community type in Montana. Mountain streams are described as are typically cold and clear, and serve as the headwaters for all major river systems in Montana. Mountain streams often flow through montane conifer forests beginning at the highest elevations, and can range diversely from high-alpine, steep gradient reaches to low-gradient, meadow stream types.

10. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

If the proposed acquisition were approved, the grazing leases associated with the adjacent BLM (220 acres) and DNRC (640 acres) lands would be transferred to FWP. FWP would continue to abide to the terms of those leases with their respective agencies and would renew then when current leases expire.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			X			1d
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1 b/d. FWP's proposed acquisition of the 2,840-acre Whitetail Prairie property would likely have minor positive or no impacts to the land resources as cattle grazing will cease and public recreational access activities would continue to be permitted. Minor short term impacts to soils and/or streambeds caused by

cattle during grazing periods would decrease due to the property being completely rested from cattle grazing.

No changes are anticipated that would alter soil stability, unique geologic or physical features, or expose people or property to a variety of ground failures as the property would be maintained as open space for the benefit of wildlife.

Any mineral rights associated with the Whitetail Prairie property would be transferred to FWP if the acquisition were approved.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)		X				

The ambient air quality would not change if FWP acquisition of the Whitetail Prairie property were approved since motorized access would not be allowed on the property and FWP has no plans to construct additional roads or facilities within the addition.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				

h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				3i
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				3l
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

The proposed property exchange would have no effect on existing quality, quantity or flooding of natural surface waters or groundwater.

3i. A search of the DNRC water rights database identified eleven water rights associated with the Whitetail Prairie property. All of the water rights are within Sections 1, 12, 26, and 35 and used for livestock watering (cattle). Water rights within Section 12 are identified with Cottonwood Creek and the remaining rights are in the other sections identified with a tributary of Wegner Creek.

3l. A search of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Flood Map Service Center directory identified the property within an area designated in which "flood hazards are undetermined, but possible." (FEMA map #30049C165E, effective date Sept. 19, 2012). All the creeks within the property are perennial, thus they have the potential to flood if severe conditions occur.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				4d
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?					Y	4e
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				4d & 4f

4a. The proposed 2,840-acre acquisition is expected to have a positive impact on existing vegetation under the WMA's management philosophy in that native plants would be protected from disturbances, noxious weed infestations, and the habitat would be maintained for the benefit of wildlife species. The project would allow FWP to positively maintain and/or enhance 2,840 additional acres (plus associated BLM and DNRC leased acres) of native intermountain habitats adjacent to the BTWMA in perpetuity.

The existing diversity and abundance of vegetation is not expected to change if the property were acquired by FWP, since the property would remain areas of open space for the preservation of wildlife habitat and recreational activities. If the property were sold to another buyer, there is no guarantee these wildlife and fisheries habitats would be protected. The proposed project removes threats such as subdivision, cabins, hobby farms or improper livestock grazing practices.

4c. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Species of Concern database reported there are no listed observations of sensitive plant species (threatened, endangered or state species of concern) within the property.

4d. The property has only been used for cattle grazing. Additionally, there are no acres on the property designated by the US Department of Agriculture as prime or unique farmlands. (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey database, 9/9/14).

4e. The proposed addition would be managed as part of, and would fall under the same weed control plan as the BTMWA. Presently, there are small isolated infestations of Spotted Knapweed, Sulfur Cinqufoil, Dalmation Toadflax, Whitetop, Leafy Spurge, Houndstongue and Canada Thistle. If the acquisition is approved, FWP would implement the BTWMA Noxious Weed Management Plan using an integrated approach to noxious weeds management on the property by using chemical and/or biological control methods. The implementation of these weed management methods on the BTWMA have been reviewed and approved by the Lewis and Clark and Cascade County Weed Districts.

4f. No wetlands are identified on the property by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wetlands Inventory database (9/8/14) and also confirmed by Grant Grisak, FWP Region 4 Fisheries Manager.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				5a
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				5g
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				5h
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				

5a. The proposed acquisition would not impact fish or wildlife habitat or their associated species (Grant Grisak, FWP Region 4 Fisheries Manager, and Cory Loecker, FWP Region 4 Area Wildlife Biologist). The acquisition of the Whitetail Prairie property would protect important intermountain grassland habitat used by a multitude of wildlife species, and mountain streams used by Montana's native westslope cutthroat trout.

5f/h. As identified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (March 2014), species identified under the Endangered Species Act include: grizzly bear, Canada lynx, black-footed ferret, wolverine, red knot, Sprague's pipit, and bull trout. Wolverines are occasionally observed in this portion of the Big Belt Complex, which includes the BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie properties. With the exception of the wolverine, these other species have not been observed on or in the vicinity of the Whitetail Prairie property per the Montana Natural Heritage Program Species Tracker database and FWP personnel observations/surveys, however grizzly bears have been observed nearby in the Dearborn River drainage to the west.

Of Montana's identified Species of Concern, five species are noted to have been observed near the southern portion of the Whitetail Prairie property within the BTWMA. Those species are Lewis woodpecker, spotted bat, fringed myotis, hoary bat, and westslope cutthroat trout (Cottonwood Creek).

The proposed acquisition may have a minor positive impact on resident or transient sensitive species because the grassland, timbered and mountain creek habitats would be protected from any potential changes in land use if the property were sold to another buyer. Depending upon the species use of the property, there may be additional minor positive impacts if FWP were to implement habitat improvement or restoration projects in the future.

5g. The target property would be managed under the guidance of the BTWMA Management Plan (2008). As such, hunting would be permitted on the property as currently allowed under FWP hunting regulations. The proposed change in ownership is not expected to increase conditions that stress wildlife populations since limited hunting is currently allowed. Additionally, the proposed acquisition is expected to decrease the probability of game damage to neighboring landowners due to the increased public hunting opportunity on the Whitetail Prairie fee title and legally accessible adjoining public lands.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

The proposed property acquisition would not increase noise above levels currently experienced in the area. Access to the proposed addition would be limited to non motorized access through the BTWMA. FWP does not plan to develop any facilities within the addition.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

No measureable changes are anticipated in the current use of the property. The property would continue to be accessible by the public for hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing, and other non-motorized recreational activities consistent with the management of the larger portion of the BTWMA.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		Y	8a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)			X		Y	8d

No human health hazards are anticipated by the proposed property acquisition.

8a/d. If the acquisition is approved, FWP would implement an integrated method of managing existing and new noxious weeds on the property. The use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines and conducted by people trained in safe application techniques. Weeds may also be controlled using mechanical or biological means in certain areas to reduce the risk of chemical spills or water contamination.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
		X				

c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?						
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

The property acquisition would have no effect on local communities, increase traffic hazards, or alter the distribution of population in the area. The property is not located near any residences and the nearest community is 9 miles away via 2-track (Craig).

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				10a
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				10b
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				10c
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				10d
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.						10f

10a/c/d. The proposed property acquisition would have no impact on public services or utilities since no development is planned by FWP.

Minimal services would be needed beyond what FWP staff is currently providing at the BTWMA to manage the addition. FWP would be responsible for the following: site maintenance (fencing, roads, bunkhouse), weed control, fish & wildlife law enforcement, and litter pick up on the site. FWP enforcement staff currently patrols the existing BTWMA and would also patrol the proposed addition. FWP enforcement would continue to cooperate with local law enforcement as needed.

10b. No net change in tax payments would occur to Lewis and Clark County since FWP is required by law to pay taxes in an amount equal to that of a private individual. If the acquisition is approved, estimated property taxes to be paid by FWP to Lewis and Clark County would be \$3,025.00 annually.

10f. Initial costs to maintain this property would be minimal and any ongoing costs would be covered by the WMA's existing operating budget. The property would be surveyed to identify boundary pins. In an effort to educate the public of acceptable and prohibited uses on the property, FWP would install boundary

signs as soon as possible if the acquisition were approved. Fence reconstruction and maintenance may be required to replace deteriorated boundary fence throughout much of the property.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings?			X			11c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				

11c. The proposed acquisition would likely increase the recreational opportunities on the Whitetail Prairie property and legally accessible adjoining BLM and DNRC land because currently public recreation on the Whitetail Prairie property is restricted to seasonal hunting. The addition to the BTWMA would expand the permissible recreational opportunities of hunting, fishing, horseback riding, wildlife viewing and hiking.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				12d

12d. A file search at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) found there were no known recorded historic sites within the Whitetail Prairie property. SHPO believes there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted by the proposed acquisition as long as there will be no new ground disturbance or alteration to structures over fifty years. Therefore, SHPO feels that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, if cultural materials be inadvertently discovered, SHPO requests to be contacted so that the site can be investigated. See Appendix A for the SHPO determination letter.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				13a
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				13f
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

13a. This proposed acquisition would contribute to the habitat protection already provided by area landowners which include: FWP Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, U.S. Forest Service Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area and Sieben Live Stock Conservation Easement. This protected area encompasses about 130,000 acres.

13f. No public controversy is expected to be generated by the proposed acquisition.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed acquisition would allow FWP to conserve and protect additional wildlife habitat and provide public recreational access to in perpetuity.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

The public would be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA:

- Two public notices in each of these newspapers: Helena's *Independent Record* and the *Great Falls Tribune*

-and-

- Public notice on the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov> - *Public Notices*.

Copies of this environmental assessment would be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. A public meeting is scheduled for October 20, at 7:00 pm at Wolf Creek School.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days following the publication of the notices in area news outlets. Written comments will be accepted from October 6 – November 4, 2014 and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

Beartooth WMA - Whitetail Prairie Addition
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or emailed to: fwpr42@mt.gov

After reviewing public input received on or before November 4 at 5:00 p.m., FWP's Region 4 Supervisor will decide upon a preferred alternative. A recommendation will then be provided to the Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Fish and Wildlife Commission will be asked to render a final decision on this proposal at their regularly scheduled meeting December 11, 2014. As with any FWP land transaction, the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners will provide ultimate approval/disapproval on the project at their regularly scheduled meeting December 15, 2014.

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

No, an EIS is not required. Based on an evaluation of the primary, secondary and cumulative impacts to the physical and human environment, no significant impacts from the proposed land acquisition were identified. In determining the significance of the impacts of the proposed project, FWP assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact, the probability that the impact would occur or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value affected; any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:

Cory Loecker, FWP Wildlife Biologist, Great Falls MT
Rebecca Cooper, FWP MEPA Coordinator, Helena MT

3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
 Fisheries, Great Falls MT
 Lands, Helena MT
 Wildlife, Great Falls MT
Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena MT
Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena MT
Bureau of Land Management – Lewistown Field Office
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Citations

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. 2005. Montana's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Helena MT

Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Management Plan (2008)

Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Weed Management Plan (2011)

APPENDIX A

SHPO Determination



September 10, 2014

Rebecca Cooper
FWP
1420 E. 6th Ave
Helena MT 59601

RE: WHITETAIL PRAIRIE ACQUISITION. SHPO Project #: 2014090903

Dear Rebecca:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project. According to our records there have been no previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. However, there have been a few previously conducted cultural resource inventories done in the areas. I've attached a list of these reports. If you would like any further information regarding these reports you may contact me at the number listed below.

It is SHPO's position that any structure over fifty years of age is considered historic and is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If any structures are to be altered and are over fifty years old we would recommend that they be recorded and a determination of their eligibility be made.

As long as there will be no new ground disturbance or alteration to structures over fifty years of age we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should structures need to be altered or if cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

File: FWP/WILDLIFE/2014

Appendix B

Draft Management Plan Whitetail Prairie Addition to Beartooth Wildlife Management Area

I. INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase fee-title ownership of 2,840 acres (hereafter, the Whitetail Prairie Addition) adjoining the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (BTWMA), Figure 2. This Management Plan (Appendix B), which is specific to the Whitetail Prairie Addition, is generally consistent with and incorporates the original Beartooth Wildlife Management Plan prepared in 2008 by FWP Region 4 Wildlife Division. This supplement is designed to accommodate the Whitetail Prairie Addition. FWP provides this draft plan to make clear the Agency's direction for the parcel and to capture our current knowledge of the Land for public consideration in the Environmental Assessment process.

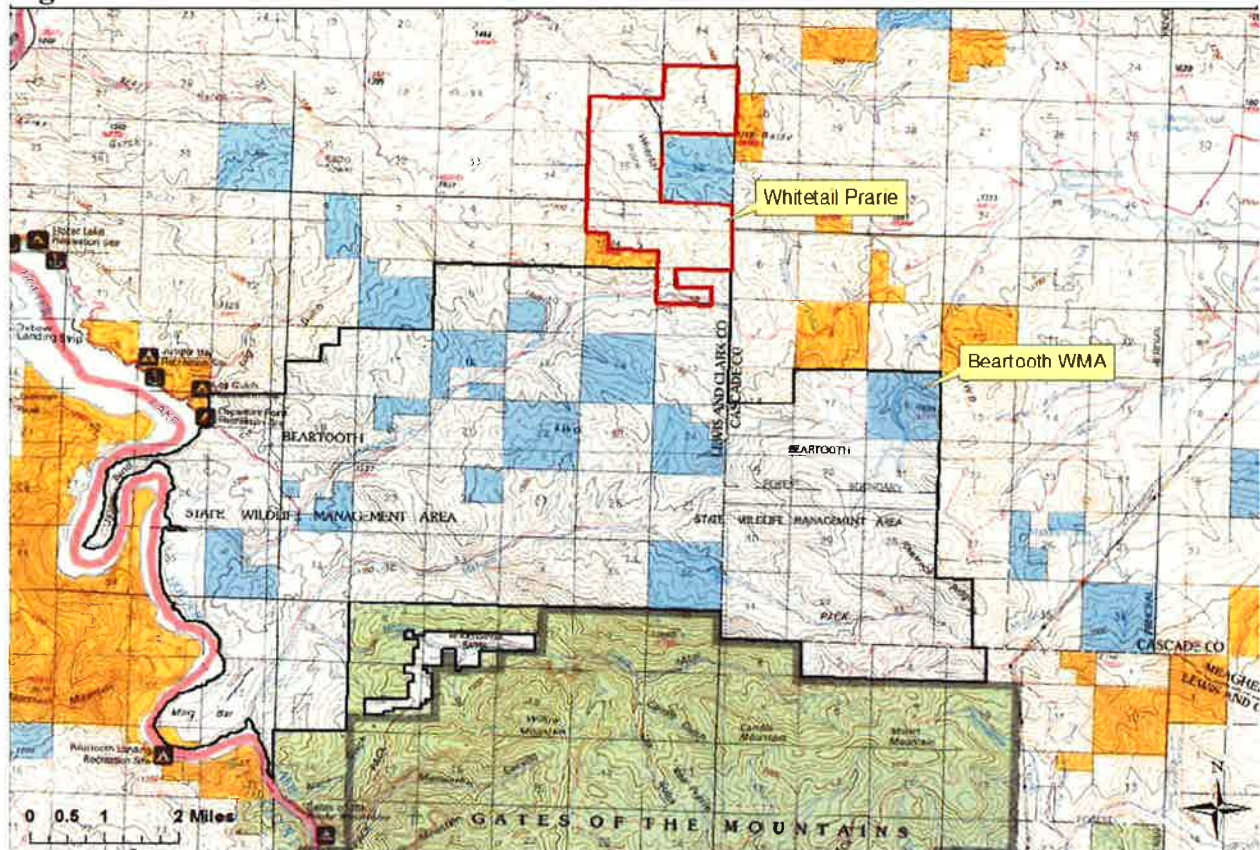
A. Property Description.

The 2,840 acre Whitetail Prairie shares a 2 mile common boundary to the BTWMA near Cottonwood Creek (Figure 2). The Whitetail Prairie Addition would increase the size of the BTWMA from 32,330 to 35,160 acres. The BTWMA provides both critical winter and year round wildlife and fisheries habitats. The WMA was purchased in 1970 from The Nature Conservancy who acquired the area from the Pierce Milton Estate.

Whitetail Prairie is located in the west-central portion of Montana on the western edge of the Big Belt Mountains and within FWP Administrative Region 4. Whitetail Prairie rests exclusively in Lewis and Clark County. The largest portion of the BTWMA is situated in Lewis & Clark County, but lands extend into Cascade County.

Whitetail Prairie is bordered to by two large, private long standing ranches: Sterling Ranch to the west and north and Sieben Live Stock Company to the east and north. The west boundary of the BTWMA is defined for approximately 12 miles by Missouri River shoreline (Holter Lake) and the U.S. Forest Service Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area to the south.

Figure 2. Beartooth WMA and Whitetail Prairie Location.



B. Landscape

Whitetail Prairie and the BTWMA consist of Intermountain/Foothill Grassland habitats consisting of large, open native grasslands on south exposures with stands mostly consisting of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir on north exposures and deciduous hardwoods of black cottonwood, willow, dogwood, birch and chokecherry along riparian habitats. These habitats are important year round and winter range to big game species, along with numerous other fish and wildlife species. Elevations on Whitetail Prairie range from 4,200 to approximately 5,800 at its highest peak while elevations of the BTWMA range from 3,580 feet near Holter Lake to 7,866 feet at the summit of Shellrock Ridge.

C. Natural Resources

The Whitetail Prairie acquisition will follow management goals and objectives set forth for the BTWMA, which include:

Goal: To manage for highly productive, diverse vegetative communities providing quality forage and cover for native wildlife species, emphasizing mule deer and elk, while providing public hunting and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Objective 1: To provide the year-long habitat requirements of resident wildlife, including elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, black bear, upland game birds and non-game wildlife.

Objective 2. Provide winter range for approximately 1,500 elk, 500 mule deer, 200 white-tailed deer and 100 bighorn sheep.

Objective 3. To manage grassland vegetation, with emphasis on rough fescue, therefore wildlife species, particularly wintering big game, are provided abundant and nutritious forage. Proper grassland management may require manipulation techniques such as grazing systems to enhance productivity.

Objective 4. To alleviate elk depredation on neighboring private lands through habitat and public use management practices.

Objective 5. To provide a Westslope Cutthroat Trout fishery in the headwaters of Cottonwood and Elkhorn Creek above fish barriers. Provide a rainbow and brook trout fishery below fish barrier to confluence with Holter Lake.

Objective 6. To provide hunting opportunities for deer, elk, bighorn sheep, antelope, black bear and upland game birds annually.

Objective 7. To provide for a wide range of public recreational activities including: hunting, horseback riding, fishing, wildlife viewing and hiking.

Objective 8. To abide by the intent and spirit of the reversion clause attached to the deed for the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area from the M. Pierce Milton estate and The Nature Conservancy.

1. Wildlife

The BTWMA was purchased by FWP to provide: (1) year round resident elk and mule deer habitat (2) winter range for migratory elk and mule deer, and (3) public outdoor recreational opportunities, especially hunting. BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie provide year-round habitat for game species such as elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, black bear, mountain lion, wolf, furbearers, and mountain grouse. The BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie are part of the Devil's Kitchen Elk Management Unit, which consists of Hunting Districts 445 and 455. The FWP Elk Management Plan (2005) objective for the EMU is 2,500 observed elk during winter surveys (1,500 on BTWMA and 1,000 in HD 445).

The property provides year-round habitat not only for game species, but a variety of non-game bird and small mammal species. In 1996, songbird surveys, owl surveys, small mammal trapping and bat mist-netting surveys were conducted on the BTWMA to determine species occurrence by habitat type and to survey for special interest or concern species. 215 species were documented, or suspected based on visual sightings, including 176 birds, 30 mammals, 2 amphibians and 7 reptiles. Of Montana's identified Species of Concern, five species are noted to have been observed near the southern portion of the Whitetail Prairie property and within the BTWMA. Those species are Lewis woodpecker, spotted bat, fringed myotis, hoary bat, and westslope cutthroat trout. The

high diversity of habitats provide for a high diversity of vertebrate species, especially when combined with the current management practices of excluding grazing from most riparian areas, leaving standing and downed dead trees after fire and limiting motorized access. Riparian and aspen habitats supported the highest diversity and density of small mammals, further emphasizing the importance of properly managing these habitats to maintain their high species diversity and productivity.

2. Fisheries

Whitetail Prairie encompasses portions of 3 perennial streams (Frazier, Wegner and Cottonwood) within its boundary, which are tributaries of the Missouri River. Westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) inhabit the 0.75 miles of Cottonwood Creek on the property which is part of a 10.5 miles rehabilitation project completed in 2010. The BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie encompass 8.5 miles of the 10.5 miles of rehabilitated WTC project. The WCT population is one of the largest restored and/or native populations in the Upper Missouri River watershed. WCT may inhabit Wegner Creek too since they are known to exist within the creek at the headwaters with Stickney Creek on BLM property.

The BTWMA has, within its current boundary, three permanent streams, all which empty into the Missouri River on Holter Lake. These are: Cottonwood, Elkhorn and Willow Creeks. Elkhorn and Willow Creeks join a mile and a half above their confluence with the lake. Elkhorn Creek has a major tributary that is also contained on the WMA. This is Little Elkhorn Creek or the North Fork of Elkhorn Creek. Because of the abundance of springs, there are numerous intermittent streams that supply water for each major drainage. The BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie addition provide spawning and rearing habitat and is the upstream source of water quality for Cottonwood Creek.

II. MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Introduction

FWP will manage the Whitetail Prairie addition to maximize its value for wildlife while providing for seasonal, non-motorized public recreational access. The Whitetail Prairie addition will be managed consistent with rules and regulations on the Beartooth WMA and other FWP WMA's.

A. Public Access

Whitetail Prairie addition will provide public non-motorized recreational access for hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and other recreational pursuits from noon May 15 to November 30, via the BTWMA. The property closure from December 1 through May 14 for protecting and providing wintering big game security is consistent with the BTWMA winter closure. Rules and regulations would be consistent with those on the existing BTWMA which include:

RULES AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE USE OF THE BEARTOOTH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Note that a winter wildlife closure is in effect at the Beartooth WMA: WMA closed to all unauthorized use from December 1 to noon May 15 annually.

1. Wildlife Management Area is open to day-use only except in designated camping areas.
2. Commercial use of or on the WMA is prohibited.
3. Motorized and wheeled vehicles must stay on authorized roads. Vehicles must not travel beyond a point posted against such travel.
4. Motorized vehicles must be operated in a safe manner.
5. Camping allowed in designated camping areas only.
6. Continuous occupancy of any camping facility is limited to 16 DAYS in any 30-day period.
7. Camps may not be left unattended for more than 48 HOURS.
8. Campfires are permitted in designated camping areas only. All fires must be completely extinguished when left unattended. Observe special burning restrictions as posted that may be in effect. (Fires may be prohibited on the WMA during times of high fire danger).
9. Horses shall not be left unattended for longer than a 12 hour period.
10. Horses are allowed in the Cottonwood, lower Elkhorn and Willow camping areas. In the designated backcountry Elkhorn campground, horses must be tied to hitching rails or picketed within 200 yards of campground, but not in mowed area.
11. WEED SEED FREE (CERTIFIED) hay and horse feed is required and will be provided by owner or user. Tags will be checked.
12. Fireworks are prohibited.
13. Pack In/Pack Out all garbage/equipment. No littering.
14. Pets must be on a leash or under control.
15. Lands and water must not be polluted in any manner.
16. No unauthorized overnight occupancy allowed in any state owned buildings.
17. Removal or disturbance of topsoil cover is prohibited.
18. Cutting of trees or shrubs and damage or removal or defacing any property is prohibited.
19. Livestock grazing is not allowed, except through a lease.
20. Public passage is prohibited in posted closed areas. No unauthorized signs shall be posted.
21. Disorderly conduct is prohibited.
22. Fur trapping by permit only (Contact Region 4 FWP Headquarters).
23. All organized groups wishing to use the WMA for any purpose must secure a GROUP USE PERMIT from the WMA manager.
24. Beartooth Wildlife Management area is CLOSED to unauthorized use from DECEMBER 1 through noon MAY 15.

B. BTWMA Travel Plan.

Of the roads within the BTWMA and Whitetail Prairie, all are private with the exception of the Beartooth-Mouth of Willow Creek Road and the Cottonwood Creek Road from the intersection of the Beartooth Road to Polloch Meadows, which are listed as public roads by Lewis and Clark County. A formal agreement between the FWP and the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners allows the Department to seasonally close the Beartooth-Willow Creek Road from December 1 until noon May 15 annually for big game winter range security. The Cottonwood Creek Road has been closed yearlong to vehicular travel since the severe flood of 1981, which damaged the roadway. This closure remains in place for wildlife and habitat security purposes. Some existing service roads on Whitetail Prairie may be maintained for Administrative use, while others may be rehabilitated to native vegetation in the future. Non-motorized wheeled vehicles, including mountain bikes, are permitted on all established roads and trails from noon May 15 through November 30. Horseback riding/use is permitted throughout the area from noon May 15 through November 30.

Public camping will be permitted on Whitetail Prairie and the BTWMA in established designated camping areas only from noon May 15 through November 30. Groups of 10+ people are required to obtain permission from the WMA Manager before using the area. The combination of organized and primitive designated camping areas located on the BTWMA should satisfy most of the demands for diversity in recreational camping on the Whitetail Prairie addition, while reducing disruptive vehicular activity during the archery/big game hunting seasons. Designated camping areas feature toilets and horse tie-downs. Overnight camping is permitted only in established (designated) camping areas. Overnight camping that occurs on legally accessible adjacent public lands must follow those agency rules and regulations.

Fishing is permitted year long along the Missouri River and Holter Reservoir adjoining the BTWMA. Public use of the Holter Lake shoreline within the BTWMA is restricted to day use only. Fishing is allowed in Cottonwood, Elkhorn, Willow, Frazier, Wegner as per FWP fishing regulations, although travel restrictions and winter closure dates may apply. Boat access to the BTWMA is available from the Gates of the Mountains, BLM Campground on Holter Reservoir, Log Gulch and Departure Point campsites on Holter Reservoir.

C. Habitat Management

Vegetation and wildlife habitat management is, and will continue to be, a focus for FWP on the BTWMA and the Whitetail Prairie addition. The BTWMA is managed for both resident and migrating big game species, along with non-game wildlife species. Obviously, different species utilize various areas of the WMA throughout the year. The goal is to provide maximum vegetative cover (abundance) and quality plant composition (nutrition/palatability) as related to wildlife needs.

1. Forest Management

FWP does not anticipate any timber management on Whitetail Prairie nor on BTWMA. Whitetail Prairie addition was selectively thinned in 2008-09 to address pine beetle infestations.

2. Livestock Grazing

Currently, adjoining neighbors Sieben Live Stock lease Whitetail Prairie and associated DNRC, BLM and FWP leases for cattle grazing. Should the Whitetail Prairie be successfully acquired by FWP through this process, cattle grazing will cease. FWP will review past grazing schemes and assess the potential of grazing as a tool in vegetation and habitat management. Should cattle grazing be proposed in the future on Whitetail Prairie, a new grazing management plan and lease will be subject to its own public Environmental Assessment process.

Any proposal for grazing of domestic livestock under any circumstances must meet BTWMA management goals and objectives. Further, goals and objectives specific to the implementation of a grazing system must be developed and followed. The following are offered to meet those needs:

GOAL:

-To provide abundant vegetative cover (abundance) and quality plant composition (nutrition/palatability) as related to wildlife needs and soil/watershed protection on elk and other big game seasonal ranges associated with the BTWMA.

OBJECTIVES:

- Promote maximum plant production, vigor and nutrient content.
- Provide for better spring and summer green-up vegetation conditions for elk, mule deer and other wildlife species; thereby reducing elk, mule deer and other big game usage of adjacent private property
- Soil and plant disturbance that will benefit seedling establishment of desirable plant species.
- Continue strong relations with area Landowners.
- Expand the effective influence of the BTWMA for wintering elk by bringing adjacent private land into similar management, simultaneously meeting landowner needs and tolerance.
- Maintain the attractiveness of late fall and spring forage to elk, thereby influencing distribution and minimizing depredation to other private lands.

D. Noxious Weed Management

In compliance with 7-22-2151, MCA, FWP is required by state statute to develop a noxious weed management plan, have the plan approved by the county weed board, and provide a biennial report on weed management activities. FWP has developed a noxious weed management plan with Lewis and Clark and Cascade Counties, which has been approved by the Counties, and is on file at the FWP Region 4 Headquarters. In 2013, FWP Region 4 established "Wildlife Management Area Weed Management Program Guidelines", which is also on file at the FWP Region 4 Headquarters.

FWP's approach to weed management on the Whitetail Prairie addition would be to treat noxious weeds using chemical, mechanical and/or biological mechanisms as on the BTWMA.

Coordination with neighboring private land-owners will be necessary to most effectively treat weeds across the area. As a good neighbor FWP will continue to work with neighbors in noxious

weed control efforts.

E. Fire Suppression

Fire suppression on the Whitetail Prairie addition would be covered under existing cooperative agreements with the Department of Natural Resources along with Lewis and Clark and Cascade Counties. Mowing of the heavy roadside vegetation, vegetation around buildings, parking and designated camping areas is conducted throughout summer months annually. A fire restriction in designated campgrounds is imposed when conditions warrant fire hazards. No developed firebreaks have been constructed. There are no fireworks allowed on any FWP Wildlife Management Areas.

F. Good Neighbor

Maintaining positive and productive long term relationships with neighboring landowners is a core objective for FWP. FWP would continue to cooperate with neighbors by honoring existing easements, allowing vehicle passage as necessary to facilitate management, repairing and constructing fence as needed, and controlling weeds.

G. Maintenance and Budget

The Whitetail Prairie Addition has one bunkhouse in the far northwest corner of the property, which is in good condition. This bunkhouse, along with existing facilities on the BTWMA will be used for Administrative use only. Numerous logging and service roads exist on the Whitetail Prairie addition, most of which are in good condition. Some may be retained for administrative use for WMA facility and fence maintenance.

The Whitetail Prairie would add about 9 miles of boundary fence to the BTWMA's 21.5 miles of boundary fence. Eight (8) of these boundary fence miles are in disrepair in most places due to age and will be rebuilt in the future. FWP is interested in maintaining ready passage for ungulates. Any fence replacement will follow FWP wildlife friendly fence specifications. In addition to the exterior boundary fence, a two (2) mile 3-strand high tensile interior grazing fence exists in Sections 1 and 2 of Whitetail Prairie which was utilized to better manage cattle use of the Cottonwood Creek pasture of Whitetail Prairie and BTWMA during scheduled grazed periods. This project was completed in 2012 using FWP's Future Fisheries Program assistance. This fence will remain in place which could be used for cattle grazing management should grazing be allowed in the future.

To accomplish boundary fence reconstruction, FWP has requested \$120,000 in start-up funding for use during the first 5 years. These funds would be used to rebuild and maintain of existing fencing, property boundary survey of corner pins and sign boundaries.

Estimated start-up costs include:

- Fencing \$15,00/mile for up to 8 miles = \$120,000
- Fence maintenance \$2,500/mile for one mile = \$2,500
- Fence removal \$2,500/mile for 2.5 miles = \$5,000

- Ground Spray \$30/acre for 25 acres and follow up work = \$750
- Boundary Survey = \$3,000
- *Total Estimated Start Up Costs= \$131,250*

These initial expenditures made during the first 5 years of FWP ownership would cover the most significant costs associated with purchase of the property and providing for public use. Future expenditures to spot-spray weeds, insects for biological control, maintain fences, bunkhouse maintenance and sign the property would be necessary to manage the property to the satisfaction of FWP, our neighbors and the public.

H. Commercial Use

In 2007 FWP constructed rules for commercial use on FWP owned and managed lands and waters, including Wildlife Management Areas. As per Nature Conservancy deed to the property, no commercial use is allowed on the Beartooth WMA.